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## FUNERAL HONORS SUPPORT

by

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## *Preface*

This research project addresses the issue of funeral honors support provided to veterans in a time of increasing demand and reduced ability to meet that demand. (Please note that unless stated otherwise, the term veteran refers to all categories of military members authorized honors support.) We chose to research this topic because of our belief in the importance of ensuring our veterans are properly honored at the time of their death. We hope this paper will serve to pull together many of the efforts that have occurred to make dignified honors a reality for all American veterans. Additionally, we hope to convince readers of the essentiality of providing support regardless of either real or perceived constraints.

This paper could not have been written without the assistance of numerous people. Mr. Jim Halvorson and Col Harry Mamaux of Air Force Services were instrumental in providing information regarding on-going efforts to comply with the FY 99 Authorization Bill requiring DOD to look at this issue. Chaplain David White, USN, RADM (ret.), Executive Director of the Military Chaplains Association also assisted greatly in the effort.

### *Abstract*

Veterans and prior-service members of the American armed forces perceive a steady erosion of promised benefits; not the least of these being funeral honors. They argue that if their country is going to short-change them regarding healthcare, commissary and pay issues, that's one thing. But dignified burial rites are not one of the negotiables. Unfortunately, base realignment and closure efforts and force reduction actions have enlarged the areas of responsibilities for honor guard details. This has occurred simultaneously with a one-third decrease in active duty end-strength since 1989 and a one-fourth decrease in Selected Guard and Reserve. An increased operations tempo and a substantial increase in deaths of service veterans since 1989—up 25 percent by the year 2000 and peaking at 2008 with another 10 percent increase, significantly exacerbates the problem. Having to do more with less may not be the only problem. DOD always seems to find the resources to do what is viewed as truly important. One might argue that an apparent cultural shift has contributed to less importance being placed on rituals such as funeral honors. In a time of competing resources and a focus on technological advances, “softer” applications of militarism often tend to fall by the wayside.

This paper argues that providing honors support is essential to the health and well being of our military culture. It provides a snapshot of the current ability of DOD to perform this critical mission by examining relevant legislation and policy. Current and forecasted funeral demands are evaluated along with the possible use of National Guard,

Reserve and Veteran Service Organizations to meet those demands. Finally, recommendations that include greater inter-service coordination, more efficient use of the “Total Force,” proper funding, creativity and communication will all argue that the answers are within reach. America’s veterans deserve nothing less.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

*It is going to be our job to bury Private Ryan. They're the ones who saved the world for us.*

Hershel W. Gober  
Deputy Secretary of the Department of Veterans' Affairs  
Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable, 17 November 1998

### **Background and Significance of the Problem**

This paper addresses the following two part research question: what level of honors support should continue to be provided for deceased active duty, retired and veteran military members and how should that support be provided. DOD has been criticized in recent years for its inability to properly meet the demand. According to DOD officials, the problem is a large, aging population of veterans versus a downsized military.<sup>1</sup> First BRAC (base realignment and closure) and force reduction actions have enlarged areas of responsibility for some installations resulting in mandatory quotas on units to provide members for honor guard details. Unit commanders are expressing concern with the number of man-hours lost from their work centers to support funeral honors. The Air Force Honor Guard Working Group identified ten CONUS locations requiring manpower relief in support of funeral details.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the demand for funeral honors continues to increase. One fourth of the 26 million veterans alive today are older than 65,

and the number of veteran deaths continues to climb, especially among WWII and Korean War veterans. Veteran Affairs statistics substantiate an 18 percent increase in veterans deaths between 1989 and 1997 which averages out to about 1500 per day. This increase in demand unfortunately is accompanied by a 33 percent drawdown of the military over the same period. The situation won't soon improve either. The peak for demand is expected in 2008 with an estimated 620,000 deaths, an increase of 35 percent over the 1989 death rate, or approximately 1,700 per day.<sup>3</sup>

### **Limitations of the Study**

This research was conducted over a three-month period and is therefore unable to completely capture every issue associated with this subject. It was also conducted primarily from an Air Force point of view. Other service personnel should find the information contained within useful, but must keep in mind the “blueness” of the perspective from which it was written. The researchers have however, attempted to provide a well-rounded, unbiased review of the problem and the potential solutions.

### **Preview of the Argument**

The provision of honors support is an important right guaranteed to those who have answered the call of our nation to protect our national interests at home and abroad. Further, the ceremonial display of funeral honors serves to nurture the ideals of loyalty and oneness within the military culture. These are essential characteristics of the warfighter. We cannot therefore, let this right fall by the wayside or we risk degrading the culture of our military and in turn, our national defense.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Paul Stone, “DoD Wrestles Funeral, Personnel Demands,” American Forces Press Service, *Pentagram*, 27 November, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Jim Halvorson, HQ USAF/ILVX, *Bullet Background Paper on Base Honor Guard Support for Military Funerals*. 23 September 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Stone, *DoD Wrestles Funeral, Personnel Demands*

## Chapter 2

### Societal Impact of Honors Support

*Show me the manner in which a Nation or a community cares for its dead and I will measure with mathematical exactness the tender sympathies of its people, their respect for the laws of the land and their loyalty to high ideals.*

Sir Gladstone  
Prime Minister of England in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century

### Evolution of Honors Support

As best we can tell, the formal military burial began with the ancient Greeks in 490 BC. The firing of three volleys as part of the military funeral rite began with the Romans and was based on the custom of casting dirt three times on the coffins of deceased soldiers. The interment of military members in military cemeteries began when those originally interred on the battlefield were transferred to the post cemetery in 1847. In 1861, registered headboards were provided for each soldier's grave and one year later, President Lincoln established national cemeteries. General Butterfield composed Taps in 1862 for play during military funerals. In 1918, the Army began the time-honored tradition of placing a flag over the coffin and presenting it to the next of kin.<sup>1</sup> Although some customs were observed earlier, the Mexican American War of 1846-1847 saw a major advance in American policy in this area. Congress appropriated funds for a cemetery in Mexico City in 1850 to serve those military members who had died along the

route of the campaign to capture the city. The Civil War however is where many of our current burial practices were developed. It was then that the War Department ordered the Quartermaster General to provide materials for registered headboards for soldiers' graves. Congress authorized the President to purchase cemetery grounds for military burials in 1862 and it was at this time that the burial sites of major battles were transformed into national cemeteries.<sup>2</sup> The custom of leading the riderless horse behind the coffin came from ancient times when it was customary to bury a warrior's horse with him so that the horse could serve its master in the next world. This custom was still observed for great military commanders in some European countries as late as the eighteenth century. General Butterfield may have composed the Taps we play today, but the custom of sounding of Last Post may actually have originated from the "clang of trumpets" sounded at the cremation of warriors during Trojan days.<sup>3</sup> As you can see, funeral honors have always been a part of the military culture, but why? What's so important about this ritual?

### **Impact of Honors Support on the Military Culture**

It is estimated that it will soon cost the United States Air Force more than \$21 million to bury its dead each year.<sup>4</sup> Some would say that these rituals are becoming extinct and no longer serve the purpose for which they were intended. Multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies as ours can't afford costly, antiquated rituals that no longer serve the general populace. The preceding mantra may have advocates, but it is wrong. Long-standing funeral traditions of the military are every bit as valuable today as they were during the American Civil War. These are timeless practices that serve essential

functions. And from the pen of Joe Buttweiler, full military honors at the burial of an armed services veteran is “perhaps the most poignant rite in American culture.”<sup>5</sup>

A psychiatrist by the name of Jonathan Shay, MD, Ph.D., wrote a fascinating book that comes as a result of sitting in therapy with countless Vietnam veterans suffering from post traumatic stress syndrome.<sup>6</sup> He argues that numerous rituals and practices that have been standard since antiquity were denied the U.S. soldier, in effect “short-circuiting” the psyche of those who survived the war. This omission left soldiers, marines and airmen disoriented, disconnected, and with an unresolved sense of loss and grief. Shay argues throughout his book that war veterans can normally overcome the horror, fear and loss associated with the trauma of war. However, when “what’s right” gets taken away, all bets are off. Thus Shay’s reason for some 250,000 Vietnam veterans failing to meet the criteria for acceptable levels of post traumatic stress. Shay traces the moral deterioration of the warfighter through Homer’s epic of war, *The Iliad*. He compares the battlefield experiences of Vietnam veterans with those of men like Agamemnon and Patroklos. The difference being, that in Homer’s epic, warriors employed the tools of ritual to the present emotions, not only giving soldiers the opportunity to grieve, but lifting this activity to the level of “a high status activity.” In other words, real men did cry, and they did grieve; it was considered a normal and necessary process. Shay writes: “When we examine the social prestige of the Homeric characteristics engaged in weeping for the dead, we find consistently that this is a high-status activity. Achilles, the *de facto* king of the Myrmidons, repeatedly leads them in lamentations for Patroklos.”<sup>7</sup> The essential and missing link to the mental survival of Vietnam veterans was the practice of ritual and

ceremony in honor of the deceased. Shay argues that the lack of meaningful rites has directly contributed to the mental instability of thousands.<sup>8</sup>

In fairness, the subject of ritual needs to be grounded in broader footings. This is not a military phenomenon, per se, but one that stems from the very core of what makes us human. The Catholic Church has made it clear that the ritual of death closely concerns the issue of life. They are unmistakably linked.<sup>9</sup> Even the humanists have come on line stating that “Many non-religious persons such as humanists feel the natural need to perform ceremonies and celebrations.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, we have linked to our very nature the need for ritual and ceremony to order our life and even our death. The ITAR/TASS News Agency recently reported that “the remains of the last Russian Tsar and his family and entourage who shared his tragic fate were being buried in the St. Yekaterina side chapel of the Saints Peter and Paul Fortress in St. Petersburg.”<sup>11</sup> And if the testimony of humanists and former communists is not enough, enter the voice of Miss Manners. As some of her readership proudly announces that they have invented new forms of ceremonial expression, Miss Manners responds: “What’s wrong with the old rituals?”<sup>12</sup> In fact, most of the world’s religions mark the milestones of life—birth, marriage and death—with carefully prescribed rituals that have been handed down from generation to generation.<sup>13</sup> Though the limits of this paper prohibit a complete examination of the innate cross-cultural need for burial ritual, we do believe that ample evidence exists to make such an assumption.

So what happens if we just drop the notion of burial details and allow family and friends to fend for themselves at the death of a service veteran? What if we were to walk away, claiming budget and manning limitations can no longer support religious and

cultural traditions? What might be the consequence of our deeming burial honors to be an optional component of military culture—one whose time has come and gone? We return to Dr. Shay. “For the veterans...” he argues “the unanchored dead continue to hover.” They visit their surviving comrades at night like the ghost of Patroklos....” The noted psychiatrist continues... “The returning Vietnam soldiers were not honored. Much of the public treated them with indifference or derision, further denying the unanchored dead a resting place.”<sup>14</sup> Ceremony in general and funerals in specific have crucial roles in the military. Ceremony reinforces the truth that no one is alone in battle. At war, a unit’s success is directly related to the commitment each of its members has to the whole. Washington D.C. is noted for the summer pageants performed by the United States Marine Corps elite Ceremonial Drill Team. Crowded bleachers, rain or shine, attest to the majesty of uniformed marines moving as one entity, speaking to the commitment they have not to a personal agenda, but to the unit’s agenda. Fighting and winning wars requires this kind of cohesiveness. Patton said, “Individualism does not win wars.” At war, every man depends upon the other. The sleeping man depends on the night watchman. The artillery watch officer depends upon the coordinates of another. The pilot depends on the maintenance troop, the weatherman, air traffic controller, the fuels specialist, and countless others. “The vast and distant military and civilian structure that provides a modern soldier with his orders, arms, ammunition, food, water, information, training, and fire support is ultimately a moral structure, a fiduciary, a trustee holding the life and safety of that soldier.” “Friendly fire” is a phrase invoked by Shay when the actions of one’s own interrupts this system; when a sacred and life-dependent trust has been violated. This is the ultimate consequence of our failure to care for fallen comrades

with honor and dignity. Friendly fire is descriptive of a nation failing to properly bury the heroes of its land. Friendly fire characterizes the nation who allows the “unanchored dead (to) continue to hover....”<sup>15</sup>

Serious consequences await the nation who’s military abandons its zeal for cohesion. Moral structures entice the ordination of men and women into a calling that’s bigger than life. Supporting and defending democratic ideals will never be confused with factory work. Deeply imbedded within the heart and soul of a soldier, sailor, airman and marine is a calling to defend the freedoms won by forefathers and advance the causes of peace throughout the world. Selling shoes in Des Moines, Iowa, is an honorable profession. Service in the military is a calling. To the extent in which service members exhibit a lofty loyalty to subordinates, peers and commanders, to this extent the United States will continue to apply its technology in super-power form. These unique loyalties are nurtured in ceremony. Our super-power status is rooted in our ability to feed the communal trusts of our military. Inspiring and dignified burial ceremonies for fallen comrades nurture this imperative trust. It is at this moment that uniformed men and women rekindle their oneness. Trusts are renewed. Loyalties confirmed. Callings “re-called.” This is the very ethos of the American military.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Air Force Services, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Briefing*. November 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Major Dick N. Riley, USAF, *An Evaluation of the Current Air Force Mortuary Affairs Program*. Air Command and Staff College, Air University, Maxwell AFB, Alabama, June 1966.

<sup>3</sup> Major T.J. Edwards, *Military Customs*. Gale & Polden Ltd., Aldershot, Great Britain, 5<sup>th</sup> edition, 1961.

<sup>4</sup> Jim Halvorson. *Bullet Background Paper and Proposal on Honor Guard Support for Veteran and Retiree Funerals*. AF/ILVX, Nov 98.

<sup>5</sup> Joe Buttweiler, *Saluting the Saluters*. <http://racinecounty.com/daily/82vet.html>.

## Notes

<sup>6</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam: Combat Trauma and the Undoing of Character*. New York: Atheneum and Macmillan, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, p. 64.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 65-66

<sup>9</sup> U.S. Catholic, *Ritual Rewards: Blessed are those Who Mourn*, March 1997.

<sup>10</sup> Free Inquiry. *Humanist Celebrations*. Marking Life's Milestones: A New Direction for CODESH, Winter 1995.

<sup>11</sup> ITAR/TASS News Agency, *Funeral Ceremony Ends In St. Petersburg*. July 17, 1998.

<sup>12</sup> St. Louis Post-Dispatch, *Let Old Rituals Evolve with Time, Be Careful With More Modern Ones*, June 24, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> The Atlanta Journal – The Atlanta Constitution, *Living With Death*. January 24, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Shay, *Achilles in Vietnam*. New York: Atheneum and Macmillan, 1994, p. 7.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, p. 15.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Legislation and Policy**

*We consider today the somber issue of providing services to those who have served, and to do so with dignity and respect and honor.*

—Rudy de Leon

Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness  
Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable, 17 November 1998

### **U.S. Public Law**

Laws mandating funeral honors prior to the Fiscal Year 1999 National Defense Authorization Act (FY 99 NDAA) included Title 38, Section 2301; Title 32, Section 114; and Title 10, Section 1482. Title 38 authorized the furnishing and presentation of the flag, and Title 32, the performance of military funeral honors by members of the National Guard as a Federal function, but did not provide funding for the Guard to do so. Title 10, Section 1482, authorized the Secretaries of the military services to “pay for the necessary expenses of.... Presentation of a flag of the United States to the person designated to direct disposition of remains”...of active duty members and eligible reserves. The FY 99 NDAA states: “the Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, shall hold a conference to discuss military funeral honors. The Secretaries shall invite and encourage the participation of the veterans service organizations.” This act also stated that “after Dec 31, 1999, the military departments shall, upon request, provide

an honor guard detail of not less than 3 people.” As stipulated in the act, this detail must have the ability to play taps and may be comprised of members of the military, veterans’ service organizations (VSOs), or other organizations. The act also authorized expense reimbursement and transportation for non-military members. Congress intends that these provisions will become law unless the Secretary of Defense and Secretary of Veteran’s Affairs recommend an acceptable alternative proposal by 31 March 1999.<sup>1</sup>

### **Policies and Programs within DOD**

DODD 1300.15, Military Funeral Honors provides guidance for military honors support for active duty, retired, and reserve component personnel and honorably discharged veterans. The DOD policy as stated in this directive, is that “DOD will assist in the conduct of funeral services for military personnel (former and present).” It also states that “commanders at all levels respond to requests for military honors with priority and sensitivity,” and “that every reasonable effort is made to honor one of our own.” The directive also states however, that “Military Departments are responsible for providing appropriate tribute to deceased members within the constraints of available resources.” Additionally, “when requests are denied, the commander of the DOD installation concerned should offer assistance in obtaining the requested support from another activity of the same Military Service, e.g., National Guard or Reserves (through normal channels), ROTC Unit, or VSO, or another Military Service.” The directive then discusses what shall be provided for the various categories of deceased military members. It also identifies the following as funeral honors components: OIC/NCOIC, pall bearers, firing party, chaplain, bugler (or taped version of Taps).<sup>2</sup>

Traditional honors within DOD have been provided by a team comprised of an OIC/NCOIC, pall bearers, firing party, bugler, and chaplain. Traditional honors have evolved over time and incorporate ancient and historical ceremonies and rituals. The current DOD policy was published in 1985 and provides broad policy guidelines for active duty and veterans. Services have the latitude to exceed these guidelines and provision of funeral honors is based on available resources. One such example of services exceeding guidelines is the daily honors practices at Arlington National Cemetery. Exemplary soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines don tailored ceremonial apparel and perform in precision manner with the accompaniment of the services' most gifted musicians and the Old Guard's caisson platoon amidst the majestic backdrop of Washington, D.C. Currently about one percent of American's veterans are buried at Arlington. The future may one day pose a threat to our nation's ceremonial status quo. Arlington will not be able to accept new burials indefinitely. Also, veterans may one day demand similar Arlington-style perfection of their local national cemetery. Even today, this is not reality outside Arlington. Although the standard for honor guard composition is 16 people, the teams may, and often are, comprised of fewer members with three versus seven for the firing party which also doubles as pall bearers.

### **Air Force**

Air Force Instruction 34-242, Mortuary Affairs Program implements DODD 1300 .15 and outlines responsibilities and program management of the Air Force program. Air Force Manual 36-2865, Protocol, Honors and Ceremonies provides honors procedures. There is currently no earned manpower provided for the honors support program. Seventy percent of Air Force installations have a quota system to meet the demand placed

upon them. The typical installation has 60-70 honor guard members who are pulled from their primary duty to serve two week to one month rotations each quarter. Usually, these installations must also provide a full-time NCO scheduler out of hide. Within CONUS, areas are apportioned to active Air Force installations by zip codes. Some areas are very large due to BRAC. For example: Edwards AFB, CA is now responsible for over 80,000 square miles (up from 10,000 before three base closures in the region) and Hanscom AFB, MA, is responsible for all of New England. Both of these bases are pursuing commercial sourcing and privatization (CS&P) initiatives, further reducing the number of personnel available (Hanscom already has two all-officer honor guard teams due to a shortage of military manpower). Each Air Force installation is responsible for keeping local funeral directors apprised on whom to call to obtain honors for a deceased member. The funeral director contacts the installation honor guard, which normally has an answering machine to provide 24-hour coverage. (The Air Force 24-hour toll-free Mortuary Affairs number is advertised to funeral directors as a backup.) Once the funeral date/time is set, the scheduler contacts the appropriate team chief and honor guard members are notified and scheduled and if entitled and available, a bugler and/or flyover are scheduled. Air Force policy prescribes a 19-member team for active duty and Medal of Honor members. This team is made comprised of six pallbearers, seven firing party members, one bugler, four color guard and an OIC/NCOIC. Retirees are authorized a nine member team comprised of seven pallbearers/firing party members, one bugler and one OIC/NCOIC. Veterans, if requested by the next-of-kin, are authorized one Air Force member to attend the funeral and present the flag. (All contingent upon resource availability of course). The team trains together prior to the detail and then provides the

honors at the appointed time/location. If the request falls outside the installation's area of responsibility, the scheduler directs the request to the appropriate installation. When the responsible installation cannot provide the honors, the category of the deceased member determines the next step. For active duty and Medal of Honor recipients, the nearest Air Force installation capable of providing honors does so. For retired members, the major command determines how to meet the request – normally the responsibility falls to the nearest capable installation. For other veterans, the installation commander determines how and if the request will be met.<sup>3</sup>

## **Army**

The Army acting Secretary and Chief of Staff approved release of an Army Funeral Honors policy message in May 1998 to clarify and update Army policy with regard to this issue. This message outlines the support authorized for each category of deceased veteran and the method of providing that support. Active duty and Medal of Honor recipients are authorized full honors, retirees are authorized a funeral honors team, and veterans are authorized a service representative team. All these entitlements must be requested if desired, and retiree and veteran honors will be provided as resources permit. According to Mr. Tom Ellis of the Army's Mortuary Affairs and Casualty Affairs Division, current policy is that active duty get a nine member team and all other categories get a flag folding ceremony only. The Army honors support program is handled regionally by 28 casualty area commands. The policy is that those commands should make use of the Total Force, to include veteran service organizations, to ensure maximum capability to provide honors. Previous geographical limitations within casualty area commands were eliminated.<sup>4</sup>

One way the Army is working to make the most of available resources, is to standardize the composition of burial honors teams by function vice numbers. A team consisting of casket bearers whom double as firing party, OIC/NCO in charge, chaplain and bugler (if available) provides full military honors. A service representative team consists of two members who conduct a modified flag folding ceremony and make the flag presentation to the next of kin.

### **Marine Corps**

The Marine Corps Casualty Procedures Manual, MCO P3040.4D provides policy for their program. This manual states that: “the Marine Corps renders appropriate military honors at funerals for any active duty, reserve, retired, or former Marine whose last service was honorable.” The All Marines (ALMAR) Message 3-97 of 7 Jan 97 (Military Funeral Support), stated: “The Marine Corps is committed to paying final tribute to a Marine’s service to our country by providing military funeral support upon the request of the next of kin.” In addition, in his White Letter 10-97 of 2 Dec 97 (Funeral Support), the Marine Corps Commandant said: “I want my intent and guidance to ring loud and clear concerning funeral support for families of Marines and former Marines—it is our duty and we would have it no other way! Anything less is unacceptable. If your unit cannot provide a funeral detail, find one that will.” The guidance did however recognize the reality, with: “The Commandant also understands that we may not be able to satisfy every request, but he does expect his Marines to be proactive and assist the families in any way we can.” The Marine Corps considers the optimum number for an honors team to be 17 with eight in the firing party, six as pall bearers, one OIC/NCOIC, one bugler

and one chaplain, but admits that statistically, they have average only seven person details due to manpower constraints.<sup>5</sup>

## **Navy**

The Navy funeral honors program is governed by Navy Regulation (Article 1289). Additional guidance is provided in the Navy Military Personnel Manual and the Navy Military Funerals Handbook. This guidance stipulates full honors for active duty members, full honors if available for retired members, and a service representation for former members. The Naval program is coordinated regionally with Casualty Assistance having responsibility for calling Funeral Honors Support Program Coordinators who do the tasking. There are seven CONUS and ten OCONUS regions and sub-area coordination is based on geography. The funeral details normally consists of six body bearers, a seven person firing detail, an officer or petty officer in charge, and bugler and chaplain if available.<sup>6</sup> Although the Navy doesn't keep official records of its burials at sea, the Navy's Office of Mortuary Affairs in Washington, D.C., says they receive requests for more than 500 per year. These honors are available to not only naval personnel, but to any of the authorized categories for other honors, and also to their immediate family members.<sup>7</sup> According to the Navy Division for Casualty Assistance and Retired Activities, burial at sea is one way to guarantee full military honors. Unfortunately, families of the deceased are normally not present for the ceremony but receive only a videotape as a memento.<sup>8</sup>

## Policies and Programs Outside DOD

### Department of Veterans' Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs provided honors at 48 percent of the 22,000 veteran interments at national cemeteries in FY97 through veteran's service organization honor squads. Honors provided include monthly honor services, flying the flag at half-staff at interments and cemetery personnel or the funeral home director presenting the flag. The National Funeral Directors Association (NFDA) conducted a 1998 survey on the issue of military honors with ten percent of their membership responding. Of those, five percent indicated they stopped requesting military honors because they have continuously been told they are unavailable. Of the honor guard details provided, 98 percent were performed by VSOs, RC units and others. Only about two percent of full military honors were performed by active duty units. Problems cited by funeral directors in trying to arrange military funeral honors included: inadequate points of contact, too few personnel to perform honors, the quality of the taped version of Taps was unacceptable, and distance too great for honor guard to travel.<sup>9</sup>

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1999, *Conference Report to Accompany H.R. 3616*. 22 September 1998, p. 226.

<sup>2</sup> DoDD 1300.15, *Military Funeral Support*. Department of Defense, 30 September 1985.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Defense, Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors, Executive Roundtable Pre-Brief*. October 29, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Department of the Army (DAMO-ODO-M) message DTG 062125Z May 98.

<sup>5</sup> Marine Corps, Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper, *Current Marine Corps Methods*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Department of the Navy, Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper, *Current Navy Methods*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Ernest Blazar, "Eternal Rest Grant To Them, O Lord," *Air Force Times*, Vol. 57, Issue 14, p. 22, November 1996.

### Notes

<sup>8</sup> Nick Adde, "Send-off for Vets Might Dismay," *Air Force Times*, Vol. 57, Issue 1, p. 18, August 1996.

<sup>9</sup> National Funeral Directors Association, *Survey Results of the Issue of Military Honors*. Facsimilie, 12 November 1998.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Demand for Honors Support**

*There is nothing greater than man, but against death he has found no cure.*

—Sophocles

### **Military Funeral Honor Requests**

#### **DOD Data Collection**

In preparation for the Congressionally mandated DOD roundtable on honors support held in November, 1998, each service was charged with collecting data on funeral honors from 1 June to 30 September 1998. During that time there were a total of 9,819 requests for military funeral honors. That total breaks out to 4,469 for the Army, 2,097 for the Navy, 1,944 for the Air Force, and 1,309 for the Marine Corps. Approximately 74.8 percent of these requests were met, 23.6 percent were partially met, and only 1.6 percent were not met. When a one year data projection was prepared from this data using Center for Disease Control statistics, this number extrapolated to 31,140 total projected requests with 14,173 for Army, 6,650 for Navy, 6,165 for Air Force and 4,151 for Marine Corps. In addition to the military services providing honors, three VSOs report conducting a total of 6,800 funeral honors ceremonies annually. Adding in the honors provided by various other organizations, a conservative estimate of the total number of honors

currently being provided each year reaches 41,900 (this number represents 7.8 percent of all veteran deaths during the last couple of years).<sup>1</sup> Table 1 reflects the total of over 30,600 funeral honors the military services provided in 1997. Even though 35 percent of these were covered by only a single representative, the Army and Air Force alone dedicated over 1000 man years providing funeral honors in 1997.<sup>2</sup>

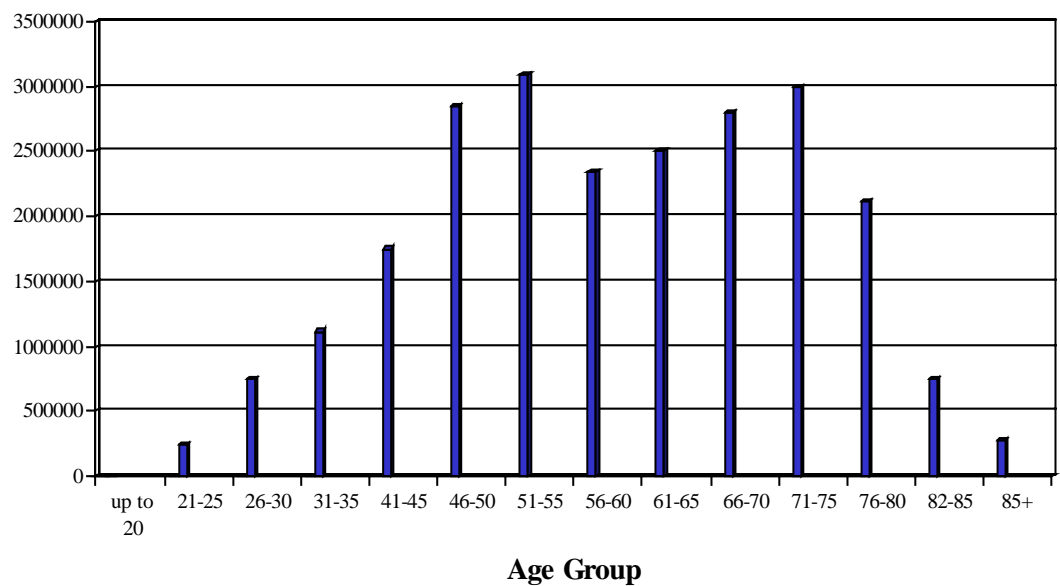
**Table 1. Funeral Honors Provided by Service and Category in 1997<sup>3</sup>**

	Active	Retiree	Veteran	Total
Air Force	233	3,825	1,475	5,533
AF detail size	19	9	1	
Army	401	8,535	6,286	15,222
Army detail size	16	9	2	
Navy	252	3,659	2,999	6,910
Navy detail size	19	9	1	
Marines	159	2,814		2,973
Marine detail size	goal is 16 for all, actual averages about six			
Total supported	1,045	16,019+	10,760+	30,638
Total deaths (est.)	1,045	53,737	482,218	537,000

### **Estimate of Demand**

The 1998 estimate of demand of 31,140 promises to increase exponentially once Congress finalizes the law regarding funeral honors, the entitlement is better understood by family members, and the number of dying veterans begins to peak. The Department of Veterans Affairs provided approximately 270,000 funeral markers for veterans in FY 97 (excluding those for spouses and replacements). This figure represents only 50 percent of all the veterans who died in 1997. Assuming those who requested a headstone is indicative of those who would want honors provided (once these entitlements were as widely known as the headstone entitlement is), the services could have received funeral honors requests for 270,000 deceased veterans in 1998. Other data supporting this

assertion comes from the percentages of veterans interred in National Cemeteries and a poll of the NFDA. Funeral honors were provided at 43 percent of the 51,000 veteran interments in FY 97. If the percentage of veterans who request honors at National Cemeteries is indicative of all veterans, then it can be assumed that 43 percent (231,000) of all veterans would have desired honors in 1998. The NFDA estimated that 45 percent or 241,600 of all veterans would have desired military funeral honors in 1998 if better informed.<sup>4</sup> For the Air Force alone, the total manpower requirement to perform these honors is estimated to increase from 40,327 in 1997 to 193,199 in 2008.<sup>5</sup> Although the next peak for demand is expected in 2008 with an estimated 620,000 deaths, estimates indicate that we will see another spike in the 2015 time frame with Vietnam veteran deaths. As illustrated by the FY 97 actuarial age of veterans population in Figure 1, the problem is not going away.



**Figure 1. Veterans Population—FY 97<sup>6</sup>**

## **Priority of Components Provided for Funeral Honors**

Although the vast majority of funeral honors for veterans are provided by their own branch of service, veterans and military service organizations have indicated this is preferred, but not essential. They do however indicate a strong preference for having the parent service present the flag, and most importantly, for a uniformed presence. The only organization with a strong preference was the Marine Corps League who stated it is “critical” that all funeral detail members be from the parent service (Marine Corps). The bottom line is that the veterans and military service organizations expressed a preference for funeral honors details to be composed of members of the veteran’s service, but found it acceptable for any of the services to provide the funeral honors versus none being provided at all.<sup>7</sup> Various veteran’s service organizations have also indicated which of the components of the funeral honors are most critical. These VSOs say that flag folding and presentation are by far considered the most important element of funeral honors. Several veterans present at the AMVETS National Convention stated that the presentation of the flag at the burial is critical to the families achieving a sense of closure.<sup>8</sup> Bob Manhan of the Veterans of Foreign Wars said: “the minimum anyone should expect is that his or her surviving family members would be presented with a flag by a uniformed member of his or her service.”<sup>9</sup> The second most important component of funeral honors is the playing of Taps and they indicated that while a bugler is preferred (need not be a uniformed service member), a high-quality recording is acceptable. With respect to the firing parties, the veterans pointed to the importance of Reserve/National Guard being in a duty status and on orders to provide funeral honors. This allows them to draw weapons and protects all from liability. Pallbearers were generally seen as having the lowest priority.<sup>10</sup> During the DOD directed service data collection in 1998, flag folding was requested in

93.6 percent of the total requests for military funeral honors. A firing party was requested for 63.6 percent, playing of Taps for 55 percent, pall bearers for 44.9 percent and a chaplain for 7.8 percent. The only disconnect between priorities from the perspective of the VSOs and the service data collection was that the veterans place the playing of taps ahead of the firing party in importance.

### **Chaplain's Role in Military Funerals**

Military chaplains are ordained/certified clergy endorsed into the service chaplaincies from approximately 200 distinct religious faith groups and denominations of the United States. Military chaplains are therefore responsible to their respective faith groups for the content and conduct of religious rites and ceremonies, to include an optional, religious component of military funeral honors. There are approximately 2,275 active duty chaplains serving 1.4 million military active duty men and women in the Armed Forces. In the past five years, the military chaplaincies have been reduced in end strength by approximately 20 percent. On average, 20 to 35 percent of active duty chaplains are in a deployable status at any given time; with approximately 14 percent assigned to overseas military installations. Active duty chaplains within each of the military branches have performed an annual minimum of 3,100 funerals and memorial services in the past five years. There are 2,750 reserve chaplains represented in the five major reserve components of the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Army National Guard, and Air National Guard. The majority of reserve chaplain billet incumbents are in non-pay slots, and they participate in funeral honors at their own travel expense. Reserve chaplains are geographically dispersed throughout CONUS. Short-notice taskings for funeral honors are often more difficult to accommodate by reserve chaplains because of

their civilian clergy commitments. Military chaplains participate in funeral honors in ways consistent with their respective faith group practices, and in direct response to specific requests from the deceased family. Military chaplains provide for or facilitate the provision of religious rites and rituals, contingent upon the availability of active duty or reserve chaplains in that particular region or area. For many, the participation of a military chaplain in funeral honors is not inherently integral to the ceremony; rather, it is an optional component based upon the preference of the survivor(s) of the deceased. However, there is a venerable and distinct tradition involving a military chaplain in honoring our nation's dead in both combat and crisis.<sup>11</sup> VSO members expressed a concern with obtaining military chaplains for funeral honors. Specifically, they said funeral home directors don't always know how to contact a chaplain. They also stated that guidelines for service and more standardization are needed for military chaplains.<sup>12</sup>

It must be noted that often in dealing with the families of veterans, the family has transferred its ecclesiastical allegiance from the military chapel to a civilian church, synagogue or mosque. In making this shift, families will often prefer their family minister or rabbi to perform the religious aspects of the burial ceremony. Military chaplains have as primary focus, ministry to the active duty forces and their families. This does not exclude retired and former military families, but places the active duty force in the forefront of ministry focus. Active duty chaplains will continue to assist as able in funeral honors as requested. However, it is critical to include civilian clergy into the equation and for participating honor guard details to work in harmony with them, giving the families of those who have faithfully served our nation the highest degree of honor and dignity possible.

## Factors Affecting Ability to Meet Demand

The location of installations, (almost 100 US bases have closed since 1991), and their associated manpower, significantly impacts the ability to provide honors. The veteran population is not always located around military installations. The time required to travel the distance greatly impacts availability of resources to provide support. Availability to provide honors therefore, is often totally indiscriminate and out of either party's control but merely a factor of location. This situation is exacerbated when each military service must support funeral honors for veterans from its own service.”<sup>13</sup> Since 1989, the active duty force has decreased 33 percent and the RC forces by 25 percent. Of the 1.4 million left, 26 percent are stationed overseas, eight percent are deployed to support operational missions, and over 14 percent are not available for other reasons such as being in training or en route to a new duty station. This means that 48.3 percent of the reduced force is not available to provide honors support.<sup>14</sup> The playing of Taps is often especially difficult to provide, due to the shortage of military buglers—only 508 left in 1998. These personnel are often located at only a few locations in military bands with some being overseas. Although DOD policy allows for playing of Taps, it does not stipulate it must be provided live. Veteran's service organizations have indicated a quality recording is acceptable.<sup>15</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Estimate of Demand for Military Funeral Honors*. 13 November, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Col Harry Mamaux, HQ USAF/ILVX, *Funeral Honors Briefing to AMVETS National Convention*. 12 August 1998.

<sup>3</sup> HQ USAF/ILV Briefing, undated.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Estimate of Demand for Military Funeral Honors*. 13 November, 1998.

<sup>5</sup> HQ USAF/ILV Briefing, undated.

## Notes

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Col Jack Padgett, USD(P&R), 22 December, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Importance of the Parent Service Providing Funeral Honors*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Col Harry Mamaux, HQ USAF/ILVX, *Summary of Events for 12 August Trip to AMVETS National Convention*. undated.

<sup>9</sup> Nick Adde, “Congress Wants Military Honors for All Eligible Vets”. *Navy Times*, Vol. 47, p. 25, May 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Col Harry Mamaux, HQ USAF/ILVX, *Summary of Events for 12 August Trip to AMVETS National Convention*. undated.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Chaplain’s Role in Military Funerals*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Summary of VSO Working Group Session, 18 September 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Impact of Geography and the Location of Military Installations*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Greater Demand on Smaller Force Reduces Manpower Availability*. 13 November, 1998.

<sup>15</sup> Department of Defense, *Executive Roundtable Briefing*. undated.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Alternative Methods and Resources**

*We cannot expect a group of older veterans to provide these services day in and day out for their military peers. We are simply asking too much of a generation that has already given so much.*

—Senator Patty Murray, D-Wash.

#### **Within DOD**

##### **Use of Reserve Component (RC) Forces**

According to Service data collection, the average distance traveled for honor guard in 1998 was 63.1 miles. Although using active duty personnel is preferred, the geographical and availability limitations are real. The Guard and Reserve are more diverse geographically, but DOD does not control the resources and they are volunteers for the program and must be released from their employers. In addition, the required drill cannot be replaced, no federal funding is identified to compensate them other than a plan to provide them retirement points for participation.<sup>1</sup> Two senators, Patty Murray, D-Wash. and Ben Nighthorse Campbell, R-Colo., introduced bill (S 324) to allow National Guard personnel to serve on honor guard details and receive duty credit. Senator Murray said her legislation would allow “veterans to see fellow veterans treated with the appropriate respect and admiration they deserve.” The problem with the bill was that RC

forces are also being downsized so their availability is also in question.<sup>2</sup> This bill became part of the DOD Authorization Act for 1998 which now allows members of the National Guard to receive federal pay for support for honor guard duty. Unfortunately, this hasn't helped the shortage much since no additional funds were authorized for this purpose.<sup>3</sup>

### **Air Force Pilot Test**

The Air Force conducted a test program at March AFB to augment the active duty honor guard at Edwards AFB with Air Reserve Component (ARC) personnel in areas most affected by the decreasing number of bases and other force reduction actions. The intent of the test was to test augmentation by ARC forces to reduce the size of the active honor guard requirement. Volunteers were solicited from the ARC forces and the Air Force provided 139 man-days per person to activate the volunteers in support of funeral details at Riverside National Cemetery (waivers were obtained to allow 17 Reservists to be activated for full-time duty). The USAF Honor Guard provided the training and the test team averaged three funerals per day. Although the total force team was transparent to the customer (families of the deceased), it was not sustainable due to insufficient volunteers and limitations on man-days. The test indicated that the concept of total force honor guards can work, but full-time ARC forces are required as the long-term fix. Under the current rules of engagement, ARC forces are limited to 139 active duty days (mandays) for this type duty per fiscal year per person. Under this concept, ARC volunteers could be activated for two to three years on Title 10 statutory tours and then become responsible for a specific area of responsibility. The waiver for more than 139 mandays to be used for this purpose has been submitted by HQ USAF/ILV to HQ USAF/DP for coordination.<sup>4</sup> ARC forces tied to the UMD (with AFSCs connected to

PRP) can work beyond the current limitation of 179 days without going against active duty end strength, which is currently the barrier to the use of these forces. The Air Force is considering pursuing a POM (Program Objective Memorandum) initiative for full-time AGR/Active positions, and is waiting for a review of the workload factors and price-out by the Air Force Center for Quality Management and Innovation (AFCQMI).<sup>5</sup>

### **Joint Honor Guards**

As mentioned earlier in this paper, another possible solution for providing honors is to form joint or combined honor guard teams. This already occurs on occasion, and the veterans and military service organizations have indicated this is an acceptable means of resources to providing military funeral honors. They did however, raise concerns about the training of these teams and the feasibility of such efforts. They also stressed a strong preference for a uniformed member of the parent service to present the flag to the next of kin.<sup>6</sup> This parent service uniformed presence could come in the form of active duty recruiters, but they too are stretched too thin to be much help.<sup>7</sup> None the less, using a joint funeral honors detail provides a uniformed presence, is acceptable to veterans, allows the parent service to present the flag, and reduces geographical limitations. There are however, two big stumbling blocks to this solution. First, legislation and funding must be secured to maximize effectiveness. Secondly, this solution adds time and resource requirements for training and administration.<sup>8</sup>

## **Solutions Outside the Department of Defense**

### **Veterans Service Organizations**

Veterans' Service Organizations have historically assisted in the provision of military funeral honors. Among those currently providing honor guards when asked are: American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, AMVETS (American Veterans of World War II, Korea and Vietnam), Disabled American Veterans, Fleet Reserve Association, The Retired Enlisted Association, and the Marine Corps league.<sup>9</sup> The Army has had statutory authority since 1920 to supply ceremonial weapons and ammunition to the VSOs for this purpose. According to the USA Tank, Automotive and Armament Command however, these weapons are not always available—there is currently a backlog of 1300 requests. The Army declared a moratorium on issue of the weapons in 1996/1997 because of new laws requiring more security procedures. These new procedures created the backlog and have prevented VSOs from obtaining the weapons<sup>10</sup>. Three reporting VSOs indicated they conduct a combined total of 6,800 funeral honors annually—DOD estimates indicate the real number is actually more than 10,000. The American Legion has 4,000 color guard and 3,500 rifle squads alone. The membership of all of these VSOs is getting older, and declining in general. In addition, these organizations face some of the same issues as DOD honor details, namely limited manpower, inability to respond quickly enough, too many requests to handle, and too much travel time required to get to funerals. In addition, there is the issue of reimbursement of these personnel for duties performed. Estimated costs are based on a VSO detail providing three to four funeral honors per week, traveling an average of 300 miles roundtrip (.325 cents per mile), plus the cost of cleaning the uniforms at \$15 per

person per week. The weekly costs then for a two-person detail is \$127.50, three person is \$142.50, five person is \$270 and nine person is \$330. The National Defense Authorization Act for FY 99 states the “Secretary of a military department may provide transportation, or reimbursement for transportation, and expenses for a person who participates in an honor guard detail under this section and is not a member of the armed forces or an employee of the United States.” Various methods to implement a reimbursement include: a specific stipend for transportation and/or gas, or reimbursement on a mileage basis; a one-time uniform allowance and/or stipend to buy and clean uniforms; a regular stipend to VSO posts that perform honor details on a regular basis; and/or the establishment of a per diem program (similar to the way Federal employees are reimbursed for travel)<sup>11</sup>. Even if the reimbursement is provided however, appropriate access to military clothing sales stores must be standardized across the services.<sup>12</sup> In light of the above mentioned problems, VSOs have demonstrated an aversion to formally committing to providing honors support and would prefer to furnish them somewhat ad hoc as they currently do.

### **Reserve Officers Training Corps (ROTC)**

Consideration has been given to using ROTC cadets/midshipmen to provide funeral honors but there are numerous difficulties with this idea. First, less than half of the cadets and midshipmen are under contract with the military, the rest are simply taking ROTC as an elective and have no formal military affiliation or status. Second, it is likely that parents and educators would be concerned about funeral honors duties being assigned to these students and time being taken away from academic pursuits to fulfill these duties. ROTC representatives have said that moderate sized units (80 members)

could perhaps support one funeral detail per month, but even this level of support would undoubtedly strain the units for manpower and financial reasons. In addition, the inability of units to support requests might generate friction when the students are “encouraged to volunteer” and ultimately impact the ROTC recruiting effort, which is currently marginal at best. As for Junior ROTC units, the VSOs have indicated they do not support “making undertakers out of children.”<sup>13</sup>

### **Memorial Honor Detail at Riverside National Cemetery**

Another possible solution at some locations is to mirror what is currently done at Riverside National Cemetery. The Memorial Honor Detail rendered honors for the first time in May 1996, with only four teams. There are now 18 teams volunteering anywhere from one to twelve days per month. The detail is comprised of members from military service, veteran and volunteer organizations. Cumulatively, they provide honors to approximately 100 deceased veterans per month, average 1300 man-hours monthly, and travel approximately 3,000 round trip miles per month. The Memorial Honor Detail accepts donations to defray expenses but for the most part, volunteers bear the cost of their uniforms and travel.<sup>14</sup> The efforts of this honor detail help fill the gap left by the reduction in active duty capability. In March of 1998, the president of the Anaheim Chapter of the Reserve Officers Association, Colonel (ret.) Gordon Palmer, said that “15 years ago, people buried at Riverside National Cemetery could have expected a bugler, a three- or four-man firing squad, possibly a base chaplain and two-man flag folders to present the flag. These days, five percent will be lucky if they get honors.”<sup>15</sup> Although this Memorial Honor Detail helps, only ten percent of veterans are buried at national cemeteries, so it is really just a drop in the bucket.<sup>16</sup>

## Periodic Day of Recognition

Another option not preferred by veterans and military service organizations is the periodic day of recognition. This means of recognizing deceased veterans is currently being done on a local level in several locations. It is viewed however as less than ideal due to lack of timeliness and therefore closure provided to the family.<sup>17</sup> In addition, family members who traveled to attend the funeral typically cannot travel back again for the day of recognition.<sup>18</sup>

## Associated Costs

Of course cost must be a consideration with all of these options. The FY 98 costs projected to FY 99 are \$19.2 million. When a 3-person detail (per the FY 99 NDAA) for all projected requests is factored in at 45 percent (conservative estimate of demand), the cost estimate jumps to \$192 million.<sup>19</sup> This ten-fold increase in projected costs must be seriously considered.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> HQ USAF/ILV, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Briefing*. November 1998.

<sup>2</sup> *Air Force Times*, "Put the Guard in Honor Guard," 3 March 1997.

<sup>3</sup> The Retired Officers Association (TROA) Website on Legislative Affairs, *Statement of the Retired Officers Association Before the House and Senate Veterans' Affairs Committees Presented by Colonel Robert F. Norton, USA (Ret.), Deputy Director of Government Relations*. <http://www.troa.org/legis/testimony/32598asp.asp>. March 25, 1998.

<sup>4</sup> HQ USAF/ILVX, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Results of Air Force Pilot Test*. 10 November 1998.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Mr. Jim Halvorson, HQ USAF/ILV, 21 December, 1998.

<sup>6</sup> Department of Defense, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Feasibility of Using Joint and Combined Honor Guards*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Veteran Service Organization Working Group, 17 September, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> HQ USAF/ILV, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Briefing*. November 1998.

## Notes

<sup>9</sup> Nick Adde, “Services Struggle to Provide Honors,” *Air Force Times*, Vol., p. 23, November 1998.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Ceremonial Weapons and Ammunition*. 13 November 1998.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Reimbursement of Veterans Service Organizations*. 13 November 1998.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Use of Military Clothing and Sales Stores by VSOs*. 12 November 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Appropriateness of ROTC Participation*, 13 November 1998.

<sup>14</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Memorial Honor Detail at Riverside National Cemetery*, 13 November 1998.

<sup>15</sup> David Castellon, “Getting Reservists to do Honors,” *Navy Times*, Vol. 47, Issue 23, p. 24, March 1998.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mr. Jim Halvorson, HQ USAF/ILV, 21 December, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> HQ USAF/ILV, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Briefing*. November 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr. Jim Halvorson, HQ USAF/ILV, 21 December, 1998.

<sup>19</sup> HQ USAF/ILV, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Briefing*. November 1998.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Conclusion and Summary**

*The nation must provide appropriate honors to the men and women who answered the call to arms.*

Rudy de Leon  
Undersecretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness  
Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable, 17 November 1998

### **Summary of Findings**

The DOD Data Collection showed that funeral directors contacted the military for funeral honors in 76.7 percent of the cases. Veteran's families contacted the military for funeral honors in 20.2 percent of the cases. Families are often either not informed or misinformed regarding entitlements. Expectations are often established through television, word of mouth and other's experience, and funeral honors are viewed as a legal entitlement. This is exacerbated by the fact that DOD policy allows significant service flexibility and commanders often provide inconsistent levels of funeral honors based on manpower availability. Veterans service organizations have indicated a central point of contact is needed to provide information on the local availability of funeral honors since organizations providing honors currently do not coordinate with each other. At the 18 September 1998 VSO Working Group Session, they indicated that although access and coordination were largely local issues, communication and coordination with funeral

directors are key elements.<sup>1</sup> In fact, whereas it was once common practice for the military to send representatives to the funeral directors national conventions, that has not occurred for several years.<sup>2</sup> The DOD Data Collection indicated that when the military services receive requests for honors, they usually don't know whether or not other organizations have already assisted. The three key groups between which better communication/coordination/information is required are: families, funeral directors and the military services. Families and funeral directors need to know what is available and how to request it. Funeral directors especially need to be aware of all the available resources to maximize the chance of the request being met. The military services need to refer the request to the appropriate source to ensure the requirement is met. Several ideas for improving communication and information surfaced at the 18 September VSO Working Group and include: training tapes for VSOs and ROTC, a website which would direct people to organizations to provide honors, a toll-free number to provide access to or information regarding the resources available, education and information for funeral directors, and using VA handbooks to disseminate accurate information. Improved communication would help create the correct perception of benefits and therefore most likely significantly raise the number of funeral honors requests but probably also increase the availability of honors.<sup>3</sup> DOD is pressing ahead with some of these initiatives as evidenced by release of Program Budget Decision (PBD) 745 in December 1998. PBD 745 designates the Air Force as the executive agent for a program to initiate a web site, to establish an "800" number, and to prepare a kit to be distributed to funeral directors to assist with their efforts to obtain military funeral honors. The PBD authorizes \$775,000 to reimburse the Air Force for startup costs incurred in FY 1999 and USD (P&R) has

programmed a funding stream averaging approximately \$360K per annum for the outyears. USD (P&R) also programmed \$2.4 million in mil pay and \$5.5 million in operations and maintenance dollars for FY 00 to enable the RC forces to perform honors support.<sup>4</sup> Air Force is currently drafting two proposals for the Unified Legislative Budget (ULB). The first is an amendment to Title 32 that will allow honors support duty to count towards drill and training time for pay and retirement credit. Second, is an amendment to Title 10 so ARC forces that exceed 179 days per year on funeral honors support do not count against active duty end strength.<sup>5</sup> This initiative will help with RC augmentation; however, full-time positions are the answer as extended mandays removes the RC member from their primary duty area and impacts their warskill training.

### **Principal Conclusions Restated**

Honors support has always been an important part of military tradition in civilized societies. Legislation, both past and present, has attempted to ensure we continue to properly provide honors support to authorized deceased members. Increasing demand however, combined with decreasing resources to meet the demand, has greatly hindered our ability to meet the need and the situation is only going to get worse.

The four branches of the military are all doing their best to meet the need, but the lack of coordination between the services creates redundancy and greatly dilutes capability. VSOs have been providing support and are willing to continue to do so on an adhoc basis. They are by and large not willing however, to sign up to more because of their aging and declining memberships.

Of the 9,819 honors provided by the military 1 June to 30 September 1998, only 1.6 percent were not at least partially met. This sounds good until one considers current

demand compared to that of the future. When this 1.6 percent is factored in to the 270,000 or so requests for honors estimate for 2008, 4,320 veterans would be denied any kind of funeral honors by the nation they faithfully served. This is of course, assuming that the ability to provide honors does not further decline.

It is clear then, that the current method of providing honors support is insufficient to meet the future demand. DOD has already begun to put together possible solutions. One of those ways to deal with decreasing resources and higher demand is to streamline those components that will be provided for funerals such as: uniformed presence, flag folding and presentation by parent service, and playing of Taps (recording). Although chaplains are at times involved in providing honors support, we don't see them as a solution to the problem since they are stretched too thin. RC forces can help however, as evidenced by the Air Force Pilot Test in California. They are unfortunately experiencing many of the same shortfalls as the active duty force, and resource augmentation must accompany any attempts to more fully utilize these forces. Full-time RC positions are the answer to resolving these problems. Joint Honor Guard teams are a possible solution, but coordination must improve significantly, and policies must be Joint, or "purpled," before this idea can really work. Outside DOD, VSOs, and to a much more limited extent, ROTC, have the ability to help somewhat, but again, they too are constrained. In addition, the further we move away from service control of honors support, the less we can control how that honors support is provided.

Regardless of what solution or combination thereof that is used to resolve the problem, lack of funding is a serious short pole in the tent. Other keys to a solution are

better communication between all concerned and more information out to family members and funeral directors as to actual entitlements.

## **Recommendations**

1. **The solution to the problem is colored purple**—DOD must seek standardized policy between the Services. Congress greatly facilitated the efforts to work toward a solution when they passed the FY 99 National Defense Authorization Act requiring SECDEF to hold a conference to discuss military funeral honors. Each of the services was already working their own solutions, but since passing of the Act, they have had to commit the time and effort to find a solution together. An example of this is the designation of Air Force to serve as the executive agent for developing the 1-800 number, a web site to help improve communication and coordination, and a Funeral Director's Funeral Honors Resource Kit. Even more significant however, is OSD's efforts to commit funding to accompany this tasking; something that is not always the case.
2. **The solution will cost money.** Congress will fall short of their responsibilities if they don't authorize additional funding to support the solutions devised by the parties they tasked to do so. This includes a commitment to provide additional funding to the RC forces so they are able to support the provision of honors over the long term. Air Force Services has obtained 12 full time Air Guard Reservists (AGR) (full time statutory), but this is merely a drop in the bucket compared to the 500 or so actually required. HQ USAF/DP is working this issue and has put a wedge in the 01 POM for full-time positions. This will however, only "fix" the Air Force problem. The other services need similar support. The bottom line is that the RC, if given the resources,

could assume areas of responsibility for funeral honors thereby reducing active duty installation areas of responsibility to a more realistic size.

3. **The more joint the solution, the fewer additional resources that must be applied to it.** If one side of the coin is that we don't have enough resources to do the job, the other side of the coin is that we are not using available resources effectively. As previously stated, the solution to this problem must be a "purple" one. Comprehensive DOD policies for what will be provided and who will do it, would go a long way toward facilitating better coordination between the services and maximizing our interchangeability. The services are however, reluctant to sign up to detailed joint policies due to the coordination efforts required, proprietary concerns, and uncertainty about how training could be accomplished and funded. USD (P&R) is considering a variety of options such as: each service handling their own programs independently, DOD assigning executive agents to various regions, and a combination of those options with services identifying their problem areas only.<sup>6</sup> Once the joint guidance is hammered out, geographic regions could be divided among the services, (e.g., 100 mile radius around installations, with areas outside that getting "chopped" to an executive agent for that region), with each service designated as executive agent responsible for various regions.<sup>7</sup> A similar concept could be utilized for support provided by organizations outside DOD. USD (P&R) is currently considering prescribing components that must be provided but not numbers (e.g., flag folding and parent service presentation, taps, firing party, etc.). They are also looking at certification of, and quality control procedures of, VSOs.<sup>8</sup>

4. **The Total Force is key to solving the total problem.** As evidenced by the Air Force Pilot Test of ARC forces in California, reservist and guard personnel can help take some of the responsibility for honors support away from active duty personnel. They also however, require additional resources (primarily mandays) to sustain any serious effort.
5. **Some of the potential solutions are simple if we just incorporate a little creativity.** Although funeral directors are reluctant to hold remains for any length of time (especially when doing 7-8 funerals per day), one possibility is to schedule funerals around honor guard availability versus the other way around.<sup>9</sup> Providing honor guard units with clear objectives (telling them what we want done) and then allowing them the freedom to decide how to accomplish those objectives (how to do it), will create the right environment for creativity. We have witnessed the benefits of such an approach in the acquisition world when dealing with contractors, and now spend less for the same or more. Allowing honor guards some freedom to work their issues will allow unique solutions to be developed at the local level such as the integration of local VSO members into installation honor guards. The bottom line is centralized control but decentralized execution. Other efforts being considered by the Air Force center around honor guard incentives such as: HG specialty/duty badge (pending), comp time for details outside normal duty time, exempting members from base-level details, etc.<sup>10</sup>
6. **Better communication is the key.** The bottom line is that communication and coordination cannot improve unless all concerned work more closely together. More joint policies will help facilitate this. As is almost always the case however,

additional resources are required to truly fix the problem. These resources must be provided to ensure the continuance of this vital program, its entitlement, and the resultant impact on the culture of our forces.

If this problem were easy to fix, it would already be solved. This is a complex issue with serious ramifications on all sides. It must be dealt with however, because to refuse to do so speaks to our overall commitment (or lack thereof) to those who are fighting for our country each and every day. Our military members have sworn to “protect and defend our constitution against all enemies” and we in turn, owe them the respect they deserve in life, and in death. To do any less is to renege on our part of the deal, and diminishes us as a profession and as a nation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Communication and Information on Military Funeral Honors*, 12 November 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mr. Tom Ellis, Army Mortuary Affairs and Casualty Affairs Division, 23 December, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Veterans Affairs, *Military Funeral Honors Executive Roundtable Issue Paper—Communication and Information on Military Funeral Honors*, 12 November 1998.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Defense, *Program Budget Decision 745*. 18 December 1998.

<sup>5</sup> HQ USAF/ILV Briefing, undated.

<sup>6</sup> Interview with Col Jack Padgett, USD (P&R), 23 December 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Mr. Jim Halvorson, HQ USAF/ILVX, 21 December, 1998.

<sup>8</sup> Interview with Col Jack Padgett, USD (P&R), 23 December 1998.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Mr. Tom Ellis, Army Mortuary Affairs and Casualty Affairs Division 23 December, 1998.

<sup>10</sup> HQ USAF/ILV Briefing, undated.

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